



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



February — March 2009

Volume: VI, Issue: 1

<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

Teaching English

*Oh, why can't the English learn to set a good example
To people whose English is painful to your ears?
The Scots and Irish leave you close to tears
There are even places where English completely disappears
In America they haven't used it for years.*

Prof. Henry Higgins in "My Fair Lady"

Notwithstanding the harsh judgment of the fictional Professor Higgins, the English language is thriving with some two billion users and learners worldwide. It is the language spoken by the greatest number of non-native speakers. The reasons why so many people study English are obvious: English has become an important language of commerce, science, the Internet and intercultural communication; it joins together countries and peoples within countries.

India has a long history of the use of English, as does the United States. (See Quiz Question on the last page.) Since 2004, the U.S. Department of State has sponsored state-of-the-art English language instruction for disadvantaged teenagers (English Access Microscholarship Program) in Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram and elsewhere in India to ensure that these young people have the skills needed for higher education and to be competitive in the job market. The arrival in Chennai late last year of Senior English Language Fellow Frances Westbrook, though, heralds a quantum leap in U.S. support for Eng-

lish teaching in South India.

Ms. Westbrook has been detailed to the Tamil Nadu Directorate of Collegiate Education where she helps with the training of government college English lecturers from all over the state. Her focus is on communicative language teaching, i.e., integrating different language skills – listening, speaking, reading, writing – in the classroom in the same way that they are integrated

in "real life" outside the classroom. Rather than students simply listening to the teacher for an entire class, students actively engage with the language in a variety of ways, making classes more interesting and learning more effective. This requires a significant shift away from traditional teaching methodologies.



College English teachers prepare a lesson plan during a train-the-trainers workshop.

A three-week train-the-trainers workshop at Chennai's Quaid-E-Millath Government College for Women in late November and early December put Ms. Westbrook's theories and methods to the test. Dr. K. Ponmudy, Tamil Nadu Min-

ister for Higher Education, presided over the inauguration of the workshop, and English Language Fellows Julie Ciancio, Ahmedabad, and Daniel Ringold, Colombo, assisted with the training. The transformation in the teacher trainees' outlook and ability as a result of the training was remarkable. Ms. Westbrook said that if she had to cite a single achievement of the workshop, it would be "an appreciation of the importance of

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044-2857-4000

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In celebrating the Inauguration of American President Barack Obama in Chennai with Indian friends (read about it on page 3), one of the themes that was most remarked upon was what it means to be an American. President Obama said in his Inaugural Address: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth," but bound together by the American creed that "all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness." President Obama also made clear his strong sense of purpose in meeting the various economic and other challenges facing America and the world today. He called on the American people to come together and work hard in rising to these challenges. We at the American Consulate General in Chennai are proud to serve and committed to doing our part in support of the President's agenda.

- Andrew T. Simkin, Consul General

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focusing on students' needs and preparing communicative, learner-centered lessons every day."

Ms. Westbrook organized another workshop at Islamiah College in Vaniyambadi in late December. She has found that government teachers enthusiastically adopt new teaching techniques when they are presented to them in a convincing manner. They not only improve their own classroom practice, but they help their colleagues improve theirs as well. Each workshop thus has a multiplier effect.

Apart from the English Language Fellows Program and the English Access Program, the U.S. Department of State sponsors E-Teacher Scholarships for specialized graduate-level courses in English teaching through six different American universities. The goal of all of these programs (and a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program still to come) is to increase as much as possible the educational and employment opportunities of young people and to provide them with a window on other cultures.

Americans and Indians may never speak and write English to the satisfaction of Professor Higgins. Each country has its peculiarities of spelling, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and slang usage. All of us, however, can improve our skills and help to enrich the language, all the while preserving our own cultural and linguistic uniqueness.

American Library at Chennai Book Fair

More than 22,000 people visited the American Library booth at the Chennai Book Fair from January 8 to 18, where they sampled a selection of the resources and services available to the public.

Information Officer Wes Robertson, who personally greeted many of the visiting public, said: "The American Library's participation in the Chennai Book Fair demonstrates its continuing commitment to



Information Officer Wes Robertson welcomes students of Stella Maris College to the American Library booth.

make its resources available to the people of South India." He noted that the American Library provides reliable and up-to-date information on a broad range of topics through its large collection of books, journals and electronic databases. At the Library you will also find knowledgeable and helpful staff, expert research assistance, broadband Internet connections, multimedia viewing stations and a quiet place to read and study. Co-located with the Consulate General at Gemini Circle, Chennai, the American Library is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Positive Images



Ramesh shows off his tree-climbing skills during an outing to Puducherry organized by the Consulate's Locally Employed Staff Association.

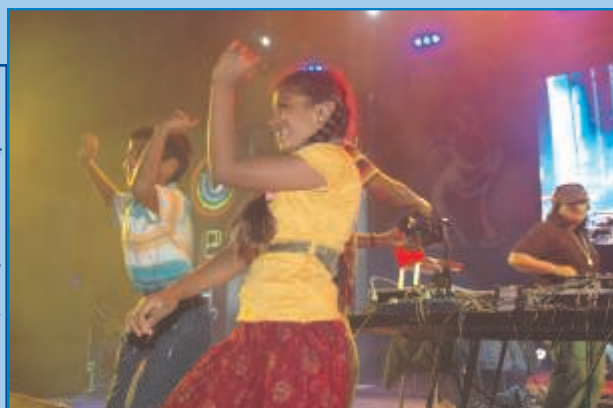


Pongal celebrations at the Consul General's residence.



Vice Consul Frank Talluto chats with members of the Indo-American Association following his talk on "Trends in Indian Immigration to the U.S."

During the Saarang 2009 Festival at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, children dance to DJ Rekha (background right), famous New York disk jockey and creator of Basement Bhangra.



Inauguration Day

Elections in the United States are generally hard fought, and that was certainly true in 2008. But when it's over, it's time for the candidates and the American people, irrespective of whom they voted for, to set aside their differences and celebrate. On Inauguration Day, January 20, 2009, Americans of all political stripes were united in a great quadrennial ritual: an estimated two million people braved the winter cold in Washington to witness the historic ceremony in person, and the rest of us settled for viewing it on television.

It was only fitting that the Consulate General invited some friends to join us in observing the ceremony on wide



Classical trio plays to a packed house.

screen TV and having our own version of an Inaugural Ball, Carnatic style, at the Hotel Taj Coromandel. Wonderful music, provided by N. Ravikiran on chitravina, Anil Srinivasan on piano, and B.S. Purushotham on kanjira, was interspersed with Mr. Srinivasan's readings from Barack Obama's book, "The Audacity of Hope."

In welcoming the guests to the event, Consul General Andrew Simkin confidently predicted that the upward trajectory in U.S.-Indian relations seen during the Clinton and Bush Administrations would continue in the Obama Administration. Another speaker, N. Ram, editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*, provided historical context to the event, comparing Barack Obama's Inaugural Address with those of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Finally, Dr. Mohana Krishnaswamy, one of the winners of the "Guess the Electoral Vote" contest, made a heartfelt plea that "India, as the largest democracy, and America, as the most mature democracy, will work together for the peace and prosperity of the planet."

Consular Corner:

Improving Our Service

The Consulate General is always striving to improve applicants' experience of applying for a U.S. visa, even though we are one of the busiest U.S. non-immigrant visa processing posts in the world! On-line scheduling through our partner, VFS (www.vfs-usa.co.in), and changes to our internal processes have brought the average time from queuing through interview down to 48 minutes.

Several recent improvements to reduce delays and improve service include: adding staff and reorganizing workflow to process applications faster; improved privacy for applicants going through physical security screening; adjustment of schedules to reduce wait times outside the Consulate; renovation of the public lobbies; and an on-site photographer. Applicants must bring the correct photos (see www.vfs-usa.co.in for photo rules), but the on-site photographer prevents delays and inconvenience to the applicant caused when their visa photos are of incorrect size or otherwise unacceptable.

As always, we give priority to applicants who are elderly, disabled or with very small children. Applicants may also await their visa appointment in comfort, taking advantage of the waiting room and shuttle



Maintenance Supervisor Narayanan lights the lamp during the dedication ceremony for a consular renovation project. Consul General Andrew Simkin, Chief of the Consular Section Bryan Dalton and others look on.

service offered by VFS (for details, see <https://www.vfs-usa.co.in/AppInForms/Lounge.aspx>).

Let us know about your experience and any suggestions you may have, as we are always looking to improve our service!

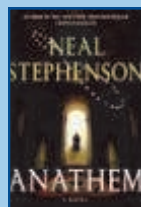
What We Read

Brian L. Simmons

Chief of American Citizen Services

Anathem

by Neal Stephenson



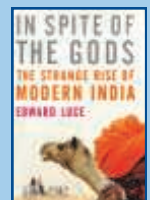
Stephenson departs from the historical-fiction themes of his last four books with this science-fiction epic set in the earth-like world of Arbore. When Arbore is threatened with invasion and annihilation by an alien spacecraft, it falls to a group of cloistered intellectuals to save the world. Alternately thrilling and confounding, *Anathem*, like all Stephenson novels, requires the reader's full attention. For the dedicated reader, however, this is Stephenson's most satisfying book to date, successfully marrying outrageously perilous adventure with entertaining lessons in physics, clock-winding, and the universality of knowledge.

Stacie Greby

Centers for Disease Control

In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India

by Edward Luce



Rather than a straightforward chronological history, Luce organized the book into chapter themes such as the rise of Hindu nationalism, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, the rise of the lower castes, and U.S.-China-India relations in the 21st century. Anecdotal first-hand impressions were used to highlight basic problems of illiteracy, poverty, government bureaucracy and corruption with a backdrop of data and external research. Luce clearly admires India but makes no excuses for its failings. The result is a complex portrait of India's multicultural democratic system.

The Power of One

In the documentary film “Paper Clips,” writer/director Joe Fab tells the true story of how the people of a tiny rural town in the United States came to an understanding of the Holocaust, in which six million Jews were slaughtered, and in the process confronted their own prejudices. The film, both thought-provoking and uplifting, was featured in the 13th International Film Festival of Kerala and the 6th Chennai International Film Festival and was separately screened for school children from many different public and private schools in Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai.



Students from Anjuman Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Chennai, interact with Mr. Fab.

The Consulate General invited Mr. Fab as a U.S. Cultural Envoy to India to show and talk about his film. For Mr. Fab, the main mes-

sage of the film is the innate compassion and goodness of children and the impact a single person can have in correcting a wrong – what he calls “the power of one.” In workshops with school children, Mr. Fab said that people exposed to injustice fit into one of four categories: victim, perpetrator, bystander, and “upstander,” a word coined by Mr. Fab which refers to the righteous and unafraid who “stands up” to an injustice. The trick is to create a society of upstanders.

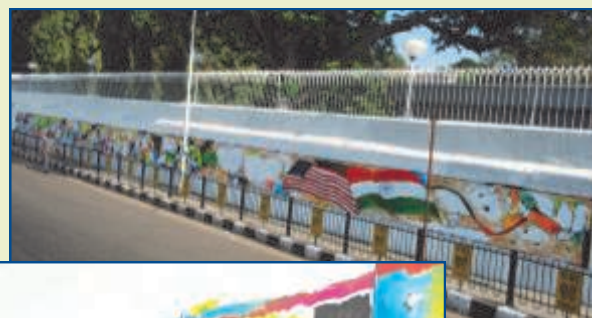
In a classroom in Chennai with 30 boys ranging in age from 12 to 16, Mr. Fab asked if any of the boys had been a victim of an injustice. A small boy named Ajit raised his hand and said that he was bullied on a regular basis by a bigger boy, also named Ajit. Mr. Fab asked how many boys were aware of the bullying. All of them. Then he asked how many had told the bigger Ajit to stop. No one. Without an upstander, the injury inflicted on the smaller Ajit was repeated endlessly.

The children, including the bigger Ajit, were encouraged to become upstanders. Henceforth, the boys vowed, they would not be passive witnesses of wrongs but would speak out and take action. While bullying in school may be a relatively small matter, Mr. Fab pointed out, there are greater wrongs, involving hatred and violence, that need to be stamped out — and can be. Children and adults everywhere should be reminded of the words of British parliamentarian Edmund Burke: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing,” and be prepared to exercise their power of one.

Consulate Mural

The children of NalandaWay Foundation, an organization that mentors disadvantaged children, together with esteemed artist and art director Thota Tharrani, designed and painted a 115 foot-long mural on the outer wall of the Consulate General to mark the new year. The mural, which features famous American and Indian landmarks, the flags of both countries and children in the act of learning, has transformed an empty wall on a major roadway into a cheerful work of art that all Chennaiites can now enjoy.

Consul General Andrew Simkin, who joined the children in



NalandaWay artists creating the Consulate mural with Consul General and Mrs. Simkin looking on. Above is the completed work of art.

their last day of work on January 4, noted that the mural is the first of its kind at an American consulate or embassy anywhere

in the world. He was delighted with the result, saying: “It depicts the close relations between our two countries, especially in the area of education, and the dreams and aspirations of children. It was wonderful to see the excitement and sense of accomplishment felt by the many children who painted this mural with such skill and imagination.”

Quiz Question

Q: What is the official language of the United States?

A: There is none. Although English was the mother tongue of America’s Founding Fathers and remains the most widely spoken language in the country (used in laws, treaties, court rulings and everyday commerce), the United States has no national official language. Some states have made English the official language of their state, but they are still subject to federal laws requiring documents such as ballots to be printed in another language when there is a large number of speakers of that language living in the area.